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Sustainable development

Oil slick on Lebanese shores

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 69/212, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its seventieth session a report on the implementation of the resolution under the item entitled "Sustainable development".

The report provides an update on progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201, 68/206 and 69/212 concerning the environmental disaster caused by the destruction by the Israeli Air Force on 15 July 2006 of the oil storage tanks in the direct vicinity of the Jiyeh electric power plant in Lebanon, which caused an oil slick that covered two thirds of the Lebanese coastline and extended beyond it. It complements the information presented in the previous reports of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/62/343, A/63/225, A/64/259, A/65/436, A/66/297, A/67/341, A/68/544 and A/69/313).

The report was prepared by the United Nations Development Programme in consultation with the United Nations Environment Programme.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 69/212, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its seventieth session a report on the implementation of the resolution session under the item entitled "Sustainable development".

2. It provides an update on progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201, 68/206 and 69/212 concerning the environmental disaster caused by the destruction by the Israeli Air Force on 15 July 2006 of the oil storage tanks in the direct vicinity of the Jiyeh electric power plant in Lebanon, which caused an oil slick that covered two thirds of the Lebanese coastline and extended beyond it. It complements the information presented in previous reports of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/62/343, A/63/225, A/64/259, A/65/436, A/66/297, A/67/341, A/68/544 and A/69/313).

3. The report was prepared by the United Nations Development Programme in consultation with the United Nations Environment Programme, building on the work undertaken by an inter-agency team[1] established for the previous reports. It provides a brief summary of the information presented in those reports, and of subsequent developments.

II. A brief overview of recent developments

4. The marine oil spill, which was caused by the destruction of the oil storage tanks at the Jiyeh electric power plant by the Israeli Air Force, resulted in the release of about 15,000 tons of fuel oil into the Mediterranean Sea, leading to the contamination of about 150 km of coastline in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, causing adverse impacts to the environment and the achievement of sustainable development as referred to by the General Assembly in its resolutions 61/194, 62/188, 63/211, 64/195, 65/147, 66/192, 67/201, 68/206 and 69/212.

5. Several United Nations agencies and other international, regional and national entities, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the World Bank and the National Council for Scientific Research of Lebanon, were involved in assessing the implications of the oil spill for human health, biodiversity, fisheries and tourism in Lebanon at the time of and in the immediate aftermath of the spill. A summary of their combined findings was presented to the General Assembly in the previous reports of the Secretary-General mentioned above.

6. In paragraph 4 of its resolution 69/212, the General Assembly acknowledged the conclusions in the report of the Secretary-General (A/69/313) in which he had stated that studies showed that the value of the damage to Lebanon amounted to $US 856.4 million in 2014. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to urge United Nations bodies and agencies and other relevant organizations involved in the initial assessment of the relevant environmental damage to undertake, within

[1] The inter-agency team established in 2006 comprised the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the World Bank. The International Union for Conservation of Nature was also a key partner in this work.

existing resources, a further study, building on, inter alia, the initial work of the World Bank presented in the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Assembly at its sixty-second session (A/62/343), with a view to measuring and quantifying the environmental damage sustained by neighbouring countries. Currently, nine years after the occurrence of the oil slick, there are no further relevant findings available in relation to the environmental impacts sustained by Lebanon and neighbouring countries, beyond the assessments of the environmental impact on the area affected by the oil slick that have been presented to the General Assembly in the corresponding reports of the Secretary-General. In this regard, the United Nations Environment Programme has indicated that the scientific viability of gathering additional insights through further studies on environmental impacts is limited.

7. In paragraph 5 of its resolution 69/212, the General Assembly reiterated its request to the Government of Israel to assume responsibility for prompt and adequate compensation to the Government of Lebanon for the aforementioned damage and to other countries directly affected by the oil slick, such as the Syrian Arab Republic, whose shores have been partially polluted, for the costs of repairing the environmental damage caused by the destruction, including the restoration of the marine environment, in particular in light of the conclusion contained in the report of the Secretary-General that there remained grave concern at the lack of implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions of the General Assembly on the subject vis-à-vis compensation by the Government of Israel to the Government and people of Lebanon and to other countries affected by the oil spill, such as the Syrian Arab Republic. This echoes and emphasizes previous General Assembly requests. To date, however, the Government of Israel has not assumed responsibility for the relevant compensation.

8. In paragraph 6 of the resolution, the General Assembly reiterated its appreciation for the efforts of the Government of Lebanon and those of Member States, regional and international organizations, regional and international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in the initiation of clean-up and rehabilitation operations and encouraged continued support to the Government of Lebanon in this regard, as that work was still ongoing. In March 2015, the European Union signed a grant to the Government of Lebanon for the protection and sustainable development of maritime resources in Lebanon, which includes a component on the sound management of recovered wastes.

9. In paragraph 7 of the resolution, the General Assembly welcomed the agreement of the Lebanon Recovery Fund to host the Eastern Mediterranean Oil Spill Restoration Trust Fund. In paragraph 8, the Assembly noted that the Secretary-General had urged Member States, intergovernmental organizations and the private sector, among others, to make voluntary financial contributions to that Trust Fund, since Lebanon was still engaged in the treatment of wastes and monitoring of recovery, and requested the Secretary-General to mobilize international technical and financial assistance in order to ensure that the Trust Fund had sufficient and adequate resources. To date no contributions have been made to the Eastern Mediterranean Oil Spill Restoration Trust Fund hosted by the Lebanon Recovery Fund.

III. Conclusions

10. The Secretary-General wishes to commend the ongoing efforts of the Government of Lebanon to address the impacts of the oil spill. However, there remains grave concern at the lack of implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions of the General Assembly on this subject, with regard to compensation by the Government of Israel to the Government and people of Lebanon and other countries affected by the oil spill, such as Syrian Arab Republic. This is particularly important since studies show that the value of the damage for Lebanon amounted to $856.4 million in 2014.

11. The Secretary-General would like to commend the commitment of the international donor community expressed in the past to provide financial and other support. Given the circumstances of the Lebanese oil spill case prevailing at the time of the incident and beyond, the Secretary-General urges Member States, international organizations, international and regional financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to intensify their support for Lebanon in this matter, particularly for recovery and rehabilitation activities on the Lebanese coast. The international donor community is encouraged to make contributions to the Eastern Mediterranean Oil Spill Restoration Trust Fund hosted by the Lebanon Recovery Fund.